

## **Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine World Heritage Site**

### **And the Local Initiatives for Safeguarding the District and their Lifestyle**

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Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine and its Cultural Landscape was inscribed in the World Heritage List in June 2007. The ancient mine site is located Oda city, Shimane Prefecture, some 100 km north to Hiroshima.

According to UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the outstanding universal value of the Site is as follows;

“Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine pioneered the development of silver mines in pre-Modern Asia. It had contributed to exchange of values between East and West by achieving the large-scale production of high quality silver through the development of the Asian cupellation techniques transferred from China through Korea and the Japanese unique assemblage of numerous labor-intensive small businesses based upon manual techniques in the 16th century. The exceptional ensemble, consisting of mining archaeological sites, settlements, fortresses, transportation routes, and shipping ports represents distinctive land use related to silver mining activities. As the resource of silver ore was exhausted, its production came to an end, leaving behind, in the characteristically rich nature, a cultural landscape that had been developed in relation to the silver mine.”

One of the most unique features of Iwami Silver Mine is that the all the system of the silver mining industry is now well fitted to its surrounding nature, which forms harmonious landscape. It is now a quiet archaeological site; however it once used to be a bustling industrial center.

Unlike other mining towns, Iwami has very few accounts on the history of hazardous contamination or wide range of damage of nature, in spite of its large scale silver product.

There are about 600 pits and more than 1,000 manually flattened land for mining, almost all of which are now covered by dense forest. Omori town, once administrative town for silver production has become a small quiet historic settlement with less than 500 inhabitants. Without its original function, Omori has been transformed successfully to a small village with agriculture and several local industrial products. Two pathways, connecting mining sites and

two seaports, were originally created to transport silver ore later became routes for goods for livelihoods at the silver towns. Former fortifications for protecting silver mine ceased to function in 17<sup>th</sup> century when civil war died down, and eventually they had returned to woodland.

Despite to the very large scale of silver ore production that affected international trade in the world and in east Asia in particular, intervention of mining industry to the surroundings is considered to be minimal and the landscape has not been irreversibly damaged. The present landscape clearly indicates that mining technology employed in Iwami was truly fits into its topographical features in an environmentally friendly way and one of the best examples of sustainable development in mining industry in particular. Such cultural landscape is rare in other mining sites and retains outstanding cultural value in itself.

However, I would like to reserve a single observation regarding the conservation of living town of Omori. Since the site is combined with redundant archaeological sites and living human settlements, heritage management policies and programs should be tailored to fit the current situation. In particular, Omori is considerably small both in size and in population, around 500 residents today, external social climate change such as sudden influx of large number of tourists or creation of tourists related facilities such as an interpretation center may lead to a total shift of their special character. Careful management for protection of these living settlements is vital for the preservation of its unique cultural landscape.

This is exact reason why some of the local residents in Omori in particular showed their unwillingness when the nomination to the World Heritage List became real in early 2000. Of course, there were plenty of local people who wished the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine to be inscribed in the World Heritage List, which had created unnecessary tensions between the two sides. In early stages, the opponents did just neglect the effort to promote its inscription, however, when the situation getting more and more serious, the tensions between two sides had risen quite severe to maintain local peace.

It was the time that Oda city government took initiative to propose setting up the Joint Working Forum to work out the better solutions for the better living conditions in Omori and Oda city in general. On 26 June 2005, Joint Working Forum was officially launched by some 200 local residents, so called ‘Citizen Planners’, who gathered voluntarily to the opening discussion.

So called Citizen Planners and local officers divided into four subcommittees, which are conservation, utilization, reception and promotion, gathered total of 77 times before they concluded their discussion to summarize “Iwami Ginzan Action Plan” in March 2006.

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In the course of discussion, they visited every parts of the heritage site with experts, sailed boats to observe the view from the sea, revisit their own home town with local historians, and had a series of intensive discourse on the future plan to protect their town and its environment. Then they made a set of decisions to safeguard the town.

For example, they decided to discourage to create private parking lots within the World Heritage Site, to encourage local residents as well as local school children to maintain the historic sites, to set up legally bounding rules for building use for tourist shops, and to create local brand..

This is one of good examples for public participation to local plan and at the same time, it is one of the prime examples of non-formal education in local communities.